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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COOL Music: a ‘bottom-up’ music intervention for hard-to-reach young people in Scotland

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Abstract

Community Orientated and Opportunity Learning (COOL) Music was a 12-month collaborative project between researchers at Glasgow Caledonian University and practitioners at the Edinburgh-based social enterprise Heavy Sound. The project began in October 2017 and involved 16 sessions of participatory music making with 32 ‘hard-to-reach’ young people (aged 12–17) aimed at increasing confidence and self-esteem and improving social skills. Using COOL Music as a case study, this article explores some of the challenges faced by community-based arts organisations tasked with delivering such interventions, contrasting COOL Music’s small-scale, targeted, community-based approach with prevailing top-down music interventions in Scotland. We argue that such programmes are particularly suitable in engaging those at the margins of society, reaching them on their own terms through music that resonates with their own lived experience. However, we acknowledge the short-term and transitory nature of such projects may prove problematic for some hard-to-reach groups who require more stability in their lives and may also lead to staff fatigue and burnout. We call for further research in these areas, and greater policy attention to be paid to the sustainability of such projects.

Keywords: Community music; well-being; youth engagement; hard-to-reach; Scotland

Introduction

In the UK, local authorities are increasingly employing arts-based strategies and techniques to address the social determinants on health and well-being (APPG, 2017:10). Yet, these benefits are not enjoyed equally across society. Participation and engagement in creative activities are often particularly low amongst ‘looked after children’,¹ those with behavioural problems and those living in the country’s most deprived communities (Harrison & Mullen, 2013:vii). Young people within this demographic group are least likely to progress to a positive destination after leaving school, more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour and are often deemed ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at risk’ (Scottish Government, 2017:3–4).

In Scotland, small-scale music projects have been shown to have positive effects in improving participants’ health and well-being, stretching from choirs for the elderly (Hillman, 2002), to creative music making in prisons (Anderson & Overy, 2010; Mendonça, 2010) and home-based music education for children with autism (Sanderson, Sparkes, & Murray, 2013). Yet, more recently, the Scottish Government has focused much of its funding on supporting larger scale musical projects such as the Tinderbox Collective and Sistema Scotland (Baker, 2017). Although the latter has been championed for its attempt to improve the health, well-being and engagement of young people through music making (GCPH, 2015, 2017), some researchers have reservations in relation to its approach, which they regard as ‘top-down’ and ‘strictly controlled’ (Logan, 2016; Baker, 2017).

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This is broadly reflective of a wider third-sector literature that emphasises the role of smaller, community-based organisations, often working in partnership with public bodies to co-produce specialised projects that are closer to service users and inherently more flexible (Branden & Pestoff, 2006; Arvidson & Kara, 2017). Drawing on data from ‘Community Orientated and Opportunity Learning (COOL) Music’,² a community-based music intervention for hard-to-reach young people in central Scotland, this article reaffirms the potential benefits of a ‘bottom-up’ approach for improving well-being and engagement in young people operating at the margins of society. The article illustrates how such a programme may be implemented and, in so doing, assesses the successes and barriers to this approach.

Health, well-being and engagement

The World Health Organization’s most recent definition of health opts for a holistic approach to the term, in keeping with current scholarship, arguing that ‘health practices are rooted in everyday activities’ and that ‘many of those are related to the arts and culture’ (MacDonald, Kreutz, & Mitchell, 2012:6). Similarly, in their work on community music therapy, Ansdell and DeNora describe well-being as ‘human flourishing’ within a socio-cultural community and observe that well-being is increasingly being used as ‘an organizing concept at policy, theory, and practice levels in contemporary health and social care domains’ (2012:110).

At the same time, engagement in the creative arts has been recognised as a potentially useful instrument for improving young people’s health and well-being, with some studies demonstrating the effectiveness of musical interventions for adolescents with psychopathologies (Gold *et al.*, 2004; Gold *et al.*, 2007, 2017; Albornoz, 2011), and others analysing how these interventions can improve social connectedness, self-esteem and interactive skills in adolescents with behavioural difficulties as well as those suffering from bereavement (Shields, 2001; Baker & Homan, 2007; McFerran *et al.*, 2010; Porter *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2015). Others have conducted research on community-based initiatives, promoting music and the arts in addressing problems facing young people, particularly those living within multiply deprived areas (Hampshire & Matjisse, 2010) and in custodial settings (Daykin *et al.*, 2011).

In Scotland, the largest and best known music-making programme employed to improve the health and well-being of young people is Sistema Scotland.³ The organisation has three orchestras based in disadvantaged areas of Stirling (Raploch), Glasgow (Govanhill) and Aberdeen (Torry), each of which lies within the 10% most deprived areas in the country (SIMD, 2016).⁴ Sistema Scotland engages some 1,812 children across the three areas at a cost of over £2.5 million (GCPH, 2015:11–16; GCPH, 2017:18–19), while the Sistema Scotland orchestra in Raploch rehearses in a custom-built facility that cost an additional £20 million to construct (GCPH, 2015:12). Sistema Scotland activities range from once-a-week parent and baby sessions, that use ‘play-based learning to teach and nurture children and toddlers aged up to three years’, to instrumental tuition and orchestral rehearsals with young people aged 5–18 four evenings per week (*Ibid.*).

Yet recent evidence suggests that this large-scale, top-down approach to collective music-making in the pursuit of better health and well-being fails on its own terms, showing ‘little evidence of transformative social effects’ (Baker, 2017). Particular concerns were raised in relation to the strict control around who could participate in the orchestras, with children living just outside the catchment area not allowed to take part (GCPH, 2015). There is also unease that Sistema Scotland has become the government’s main musical focus, that it has been spared the funding cuts demanded from other projects and initiatives and that the number of young people participating in Sistema Scotland orchestras – less than 1% of Scotland’s school population – is wholly disproportionate to the amount of support it received (Baker, 2017). Others have questioned the ‘regimented’ style of instruction, where the focus is on a narrow, prescribed form of creativity.

COOL Music

By contrast, those participating in the 'COOL' Music project attend one-to-one sessions with tutors who negotiate participants' learning outcomes on an individual basis that is flexible to the requirements of the learner and context. Following similar studies focused on the role of music and well-being (Shields, 2001; Kim, 2015), the COOL Music programme consists of 16 sessions of non-formal participatory music making, where young people learn how to utilise musical instruments, computer software packages and audiovisual recording equipment to build their own creative projects. After an initial group work session, introducing the tutors and setting out the project's aims, participants work one-on-one with their tutors to write and record their own song. Participants in the project use music to explore the social and emotional difficulties they are experiencing and engage best with genres that feature a strong lyrical focus, such as hip-hop and rap, which have a long history of being used to engage at-risk young people (Tyson, 2002; Elligan, 2004; Kobin & Tyson, 2006; Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). Here, music making serves as a vehicle to achieve success and to improve engagement and well-being.⁵

Cognisant of the antagonistic relationship between many project participants and their school, the COOL Music project follows similar non-formal music education projects, which opt for less 'teacher talk' and greater instances of modelling technique and 'musical ways of being' (Saunders & Welch, 2012). COOL Music tutors conform to Swanwick's description of a 'music leader', as opposed to a 'trained teacher' (2008), where the relationship between participants and tutors is based on the exchange of skills between musicians, rather than as a top-down didactic model wherein one individual imparts knowledge and skills to the other. This follows the general shift in focus from teaching to learning identified by Folkestad (1998) in his study of formal and informal music education.

COOL Music was financed by the Scottish Government and the European Social Fund, through the Social Innovation Fund. The project was implemented by Heavy Sound – an Edinburgh-based social enterprise delivering music projects for young people who are disengaged, at risk and who have experienced trauma. Each of the music tutors working on the project had a background in youth work and were experienced in working with groups of vulnerable young people. In instances where young people expressed feelings of hopelessness or despair, they were told that this would have to be fed back to their primary carers. In one instance, one young person revealed that he had suicidal thoughts. This was fed back to the young person's parents, school and the local social work department, which enabled them to put in place a programme to support the young person and their family.

COOL Music used participatory music making as a means to engage groups of troubled young people at the margins of society. Participants in the programme were struggling with a range of issues, including anger management, reactive attachment disorder and depression linked to a series of traumas, including bullying, domestic abuse and sexual assault. Several had a criminal record for offences including casual violence, drug dealing and theft. The promise of being allowed to make their own music was used as a 'hook' to encourage school attendance and generate interest in the project, as successfully trailed in other studies (Tyson, 2002, 2003; Tillie, 2005; Gonzalez & Hayes, 2009), while offering participants 'an opportunity to safely talk about themselves under the guise of talking about song lyrics' (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012:126).

Evaluation of the COOL Music project was carried out by researchers based at Glasgow Caledonian University's Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health. The research team carried out the work on behalf of the Scottish Government, to test the effectiveness of the COOL Music programme. This article is based on scoping work with 32 young people considered to be disengaged, socially excluded and furthest from the employment market. Data for the article was drawn from participant observation and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and documentary footage of both project participants and stakeholders,⁶ which was collated, coded and analysed in the computer software package 'NVivo'. Participant observation consisted of

the principal researcher attending project sessions, where he could monitor interactions between participants and music practitioners, observe participants engaging in group work and talk with participants during downtime. An information sheet explaining what would be covered during interviews was circulated amongst project participants who were free to opt out of interviews, without opting out the project itself. All interviews conducted with service users were supervised by a schoolteacher, an educator or – in the case of those living in care – a key worker. Lastly, the COOL Music project offered young people the opportunity to learn how to use other media equipment such as microphones, studio lighting and video cameras. This was supervised by professional videographers and some of the footage was used to evidence the project's successes to its funders. It should be stressed that participants were free to opt out of appearing on film and could do so without losing the benefit of learning how to use video camera equipment.

Ethical approval was gained from Glasgow Caledonian University and the principal psychologist within Edinburgh City Council's Children's Services Unit as well as with the individual schools and organisations housing the young people. Those participating in COOL Music could opt out of the research component of the project at any time and still benefit from music tuition from Heavy Sound staff.⁷ Electronic data from the project was stored in password protected folders on the university server. Hard copies of signed consent forms, questionnaires and data-sensitive documents were kept in a secure filing cabinet inside a locked office at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The project began in October 2017 and includes young people aged 12–17 years old, all of whom are white, most of whom are male and some of whom are based in a secure unit because they are an immediate threat to themselves or society.⁸ Others are educated in mainstream schools and were selected to take part in the programme by their school's additional support for learning (ASL) unit, which identified them as similarly 'hard-to-reach', that is, 'disempowered persons . . . for whom the structures of government have failed' and 'students who have removed themselves from the expectations of schools, who find the work associated with school meaningless, alienating, or oppressive' (Allsup, 2013:1).

Engaging hard-to-reach young people

Although the project is still ongoing and formal evaluation of the project is not the focus of this article, our early findings indicate that COOL Music is successful in engaging disempowered young people. During interviews, several participants admitted that they only come to school on the days where they are scheduled to attend COOL Music sessions, confirming previous research connecting participation in the arts with lower levels of truancy and high school dropout rates (Center for Music Research in Shields, 2001). Indeed, when asked whether her life had changed as a result of the project, one participant replied, 'well, I don't usually come to school, so having this [COOL Music] on makes me actually come to school – I've got something to look forward to' (Lisa). Interestingly, while most of the participants identified the more practical music making as their favourite part of the project, when asked what she enjoyed most, Lisa replied, 'working with different people – it helps me open up a bit more'. Another participant expressed similar sentiments, stating:

I find it really hard to engage with my classes at school and in [the COOL Music] class I've actually engaged in the work. I would say it's changed my situation because I'm writing more and before I wouldn't be able to express my feelings in a class. Whereas, now I'm actually able to express myself to people. (Sara)

This suggests that COOL Music has potential in helping young people 'open up within their scheduled sessions'.



Figure 1. Michael works on his rap with one of the project tutors.

Asked to reflect on how the intervention had changed the lives of those who participated in the project, one teacher stated, ‘one young person has definitely stopped self-harming’ and highlighted how writing songs enabled participants to open up and speak about traumatic instances in their past and overcome them (Thomas). Another teacher observed that all of those who participated in the project were, as a result, happier and more confident, ‘not just in terms of their relationship with music, but their relationship with people’ (Julie). A third identified a ‘lack of self-belief’ as the main barrier to hard-to-reach young people and pointed to COOL Music as convincing participants that ‘they have a future’ and that ‘they are worthy’ (Emma). Such comments were confirmed by project participants. John stated ‘in just a few weeks, I’ve been able to make a full-scale rap. So, I’m happy. I’m proud of myself’. Another participant reflected, ‘at the end of it, I’m a different person and it’s helped me a lot. I learned a lot of new rappers and that, plus I learned how to be more confident in front of people’ (Michael). He continued by stating that his biggest challenge was opening up about the violent and negative ways he had acted out in the past, referring to his previous self as a ‘bam’, a colloquial term for a thug. Michael added, ‘this project has made me think “maybe I’m not all of that”, because I’ve been trying hard and a lot of things have been going good in my life now’ (Figure 1).

Other participants described the impact of the project in more practical terms. Seventeen-year-old Charlie attends school on a part-time basis, solely to take part in the COOL Music project. When asked how the project had changed his life, Charlie replied:

Coming in [to participate in the project], it gives me something to do, instead of going out on the streets, causing havoc. Like, I could be out the now going about in my pals’ cars, getting into chases, and stuff [. . .] They do *dodgy* stuff, like go about dealing drugs, smashing windows, throwing fireworks and stuff like that . . . this just gives me something to do. As soon as I found out about music production and that, it was right down my alley – it’s great to be actually learning stuff.

For Charlie, who enjoys ‘gangsta rap’ and hopes to become a DJ, the offer of honing his music-making skills was incentive enough to steer him away from his friends’ illicit activities (Figure 2). Yet it was clear that the project helped change Charlie’s approach to school, reinvigorating his educational experience. As with the previous participants, the project helped him to ‘open up a bit more’.



Figure 2. Charlie develops his DJ skills under the watchful eye of his tutor.

In the next section, we turn to some of the characteristics of COOL Music that encouraged young people to ‘open up’ about problems they are dealing with. In particular we focus on project-leader Dave’s own personal story, which he openly shares with participants.

Embodying the project: Dave’s story

Dave explicitly uses his background and experiences as a pedagogical tool to reach out to and engage with project participants, many of whom have suffered similar afflictions. This appears to develop shared bonds between Dave and the participants. Referring to his tutor, Charlie stated, ‘I can relate to Dave, because he used to live on the streets and stuff and he was in a bit of a bad seat. Being honest, I’m kinda going down the same road as well’. Another project participant stated:

When [Dave], [George], and [Andy] first came in I was like ‘wow, this is weird’. But see when I was doing one-on-ones and that, and I was just speaking to them, I got to know Dave and started to speak to Dave and I felt like he was a big help for me, so I felt comfortable him being there. Because me and him kinda grew up in the same place and we’ve experienced some of the same things and that. So, I felt a kinda comfort zone and that. Like, I did have someone to speak to and someone to work with. (Jane)

This chimes with the findings of similar studies wherein, by serving as a mentor in the lives of the young people, the music tutor becomes ‘important as a participating adult in their lives, influencing and encouraging both musical and nonmusical [sic] self-perceptions, opinions, and attitudes in a positive fashion’ (Shields, 2001:284).

Homeless by the age of 13, a victim of physical and sexual assault, and with a history of addiction to both drugs and alcohol, Dave turned to music as a means through which to articulate and overcome his problems. After years spent performing in Scotland’s underground rap scene, he created his own social enterprise which seeks to improve the development of disadvantaged young people through music and creative writing.

When I was 13, my family broke down and I went to live with my dad, which is when I started getting more into hip-hop. I was able to find it and access it more easily [than other genres]. The really heavy, aggressive beats and delivery style really struck a chord with me

and I became really interested in it – I started learning a lot about it [...] I started running away from home, or being thrown out of home, and holding down an education became really quite difficult. It was more important for me to find somewhere safe to stay each night, rather than being in school. And at that point, again, I was listening to tons of hip-hop [and] loads of rap. (Dave)

Hip-hop and rap music were constants in Dave's life and he spoke of how he would 'project his own meaning onto the songs', which served as a coping mechanism to help him endure the difficulties of his situation. Here, Dave illustrates music's usefulness as a 'technology of the self', where it is 'appropriated by individuals as a resource for the ongoing constitution of themselves and their social psychological, physiological and emotional states' (DeNora, 2000:47).

Musically, Dave's credibility connects with that of rap itself, which Taylor (1997) describes as demanding a particular form of authenticity not required in other genres of music. As with rap, where listeners wish to hear from those who are 'real' and 'from the hood' (Ibid., 22), many hard-to-reach young people listen and respond best to those who conform to such descriptors. That this is done through music of their choosing is crucial, owing to the tendency to utilise music as a technology of the self.

When he was 15, a social worker from the local council encouraged Dave to attend a training scheme to help improve his prospects for further education and employment. When asked what he was interested in, Dave stated, 'I'm interested in rapping' to which they replied, 'we can't help you with that'. The council suggested he undertake guitar lessons, instead, even though he lacked the ability to pay for them. Reflecting on the incident, Dave stated:

The fact that they couldn't offer me this engagement, led me to disengage straight away again. And at that point, so you're talking 15 or 16, I decided to myself, if I can become self-taught and get somewhere with trying to do something with music, then I'm going to offer to people what was missing for me [...] I wanted to target those who, like myself, had completely slipped under the radar.

Drawing a distinction between larger, top-down orchestra-based projects and COOL Music's targeted, community-based bottom-up approach, Dave stated:

They struggle to engage the groups that really need to be engaged. They attempt to target those [hard-to-reach] groups as well. But mostly it's young people who *may have* barriers and issues – but generally don't – and whose parents can afford to pay for them to participate in most activities. Their kind of motto is 'it doesn't matter what they're doing or what they're learning, as long as they're having fun'. Whereas for us, obviously we want them to have fun, we want them to enjoy it, but we're looking at adverse childhood experience, we're looking at young people who have experienced trauma and bringing them through it – and the music is really just a bi-product in most cases.

Although it might be argued that those operating on smaller community-based music projects may be hostile to larger programmes competing for funding to combat similar social ills, such statements echo broader criticisms of Sistema projects (Baker, 2014, 2017; Logan 2016). Such sentiments also complement existing research, which indicates that engaging groups of hard-to-reach young people through popular music, particularly rap, increases participants' perception of the tutor's empathy and relatedness (Tillie, 2005; Tyson, 2002) and can be used to help identify relevant themes in participants' treatment (Elligan, 2004; Tyson, 2003).

Breaking the rules

To some extent, COOL Music depends on its ability to transgress or 'break' the rules. Yet the schools in which the project is housed operate a strict timetable wherein a fixed curriculum is followed in a prescriptive manner. As such, COOL Music demands a strong level of trust, acceptance or 'buy-in' from those tasked with upholding these rules.

As discussed in Gonzalez and Hayes' work on the use of rap music in school counselling (2009), it can be difficult to motivate young people to open up and discuss traumatic events within the relatively small window allotted from the student's regular timetable. The approach of tutors in the COOL Music project had been to assign the first hour to allow participants to focus on the musical side of the project, before spending the second hour working on the lyrical part of the project, where they discuss the specific problems the young people are struggling with. In so doing, the participants were not thrust into discussing difficult topics upon arrival and had time to ease themselves in. Yet during one of our updates, Dave explained how he had 'ripped up the schedule' and 'thrown it out the window', keeping participants out of class longer so as to delve deeper into their problems and better develop their projects. One unintended consequence of this action was that participants had the opportunity to socialise with one another in a relaxed and creative environment. Here, younger participants who were bullied and marginalised because of their eccentricities mix with older participants who now acknowledge them elsewhere in school, offering them a sense of validation and ontological security. For some participants, including one struggling to reintegrate into the school following years of cancer treatment, such socialising was the only opportunity to do so all week.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this participant-led approach proved popular with most young people taking part in the project,⁹ but required breaking rules around how long participants were supposed to be out of class. This necessitated the tacit understanding and agreement of classroom teachers who would be happy to accommodate such changes. At one project site, buy-in had also come from the deputy head teacher, a former music teacher, who was wholly committed to the project and its methods. Yet, following her departure from the school, such buy-in soon stopped and the project quickly broke down.

Julie, a classroom teacher at the school, noted that the new deputy head was worried that, in one instance, instead of writing down lyrics in her diary, one young person began writing them on her body. Although other teachers explained this was a marked improvement from before, where she had been cutting her body, the deputy head moved to intervene, ordering teachers to seize the participant's pen and diary. In response, the participant lashed out, punching three teachers while screaming 'they're stealing my expression!' The new deputy head teacher accused Dave of 'unleashing expression amongst the children', which she felt destabilised them and hindered their development. Yet other teachers saw this as a difficult but necessary step on the road to recovery.

Eric argued that in revisiting past trauma, past emotions can surface which can be difficult to deal with and, at a superficial level, appear negative. Yet he believed such phases to be necessary in overcoming participants' problems and, ultimately, improving their engagement and well-being.

That's happened to some of our kids when they've been writing songs – it's brought up trauma and it's caused them to revisit those emotions, which has caused outbursts. I think that's a positive thing because, like I said, our job is to move these kids beyond the trauma and the only way to do that is to address it. And we can't do that if we're not going to accept these behaviours. So, yeah there has been a change in behaviours, yeah, it's been at times . . . negative in its manifestation, but it's positive in the long-run because the kids are addressing their issues, the traumatic incidents in their pasts and they've moving forwards (Eric).

Eric's comments connect with Olson-McBride and Page's work (2012) on poetry therapy intervention with at-risk young people, which encourages 'self-disclosure' in the pursuit of

forming and maintaining meaningful interpersonal relationships. As in the case above, Olson-McBride and Page find that such a process results in a period of greater vulnerability, yet they maintain this is necessary and 'should be facilitated in a measured fashion during the early stages of group development' (2012:125). However, such approaches not only require support from project partners, but demand they take risks, which is difficult in a formal school environment.

As these examples show, the COOL Music project requires a level of flexibility from schools that affords space and opportunities to take risks, yet it is perpetually bound by the restrictions imposed upon it by teachers who, ultimately, must take ownership of and responsibility for these risks if something goes wrong. As such, teachers must decide if they are prepared to 'reach forward', which requires something of a cultural shift from established models of thinking, if COOL Music and similar programmes are to be effective. Future research should explore the inherent tension between music as a creative practice and its application in the more bureaucratic and rule-bound schooling system as well as other environments where such projects could be trialled.

Discussion

The COOL Music project challenges the prevailing model of top-down, catch-all, orchestra-based projects for improving well-being through music-making in Scotland, in favour of a more modest, bespoke and responsive bottom-up approach that engages some young people on their own terms, through music they identify with. Such positive associations greatly enhance participant engagement and can facilitate the sharing of painful and traumatic experiences required to process and help to overcome them. This, in turn, is aided by the shared personal experience between project participants and Dave, whose similar background creates buy-in and further facilitates the process. Thus, rather than supplant or replace existing projects, COOL Music should be seen as complimenting them, serving to engage those who would otherwise be unsuitable to take part in large-scale group projects, creating a more comprehensive support network for young people through the guise of participatory music making.

However, there are several limitations of the project, which pose obvious and immediate questions as to the hidden costs associated with its sustainability. Although COOL Music's intensive nature can serve to (re)energise participants, its short-term nature can potentially be disruptive, particularly for those participants with conditions that require consistency and stability. The short-term and transitory nature of the project also creates difficulties in assessing COOL Music's effectiveness over time – a challenge shared by those working on music and well-being projects in non-formal settings more generally (Lonie, 2013:3). Lastly, the short-term nature of such projects can cast a heavy burden on those tasked with implementing them, who may suffer higher levels of burnout and fatigue not experienced by those employed and engaged in longer term projects. We question, therefore, what happens with project participants, including beneficiaries and those running a project, when 'the light goes off' and the project terminates. This is an important area that should be investigated in future studies.

In spite of such difficulties, our findings indicate that bottom-up and organic COOL Music-type interventions may be effective in addressing challenges associated with hard-to-reach young people, helping them to engage with productive activities, increase their self-esteem through group participation and lead to the improved health and well-being of project participants. If governments wish to effectively address issues facing troubled young people, it may be beneficial to allow community-based organisations to contribute to service delivery. As such, when designing and implementing interventions for improved health and well-being of young people, the 'bigger is better' approach may not always be applicable. Thus, governments should experiment with co-produced approaches which draw on the expertise and knowledge of smaller scale and less formal community organisations to support and sustain the benefits to health, well-being and engagement, particularly that of those hard-to-reach groups at the margins of society.

Notes

- 1 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 defines looked after children as ‘those in the care of their local authority’, which is sometimes referred to as a ‘corporate parent’. Children may become looked after for a variety of reasons, ranging from neglect or abuse at home, through to requiring special care and treatment for disabilities, or because they have been through the youth justice system. For more on looked after children, see <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/looked-after-children/>.
- 2 The names of all the individuals interviewed for this article have been changed to protect their identities.
- 3 Sistema Scotland is an official affiliate of the El Sistema programme. Developed in Venezuela, El Sistema is a state-funded programme designed to train disadvantaged schoolchildren to perform classical music within community-based orchestras so as to curb anti-social behaviour and increase educational attainment. For an authoritative account of the El Sistema programme, see Baker (2014).
- 4 A full breakdown on deprivation levels in these areas can be accessed via the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. See <http://simd.scot/2016/#/simd2016/BTTTTFTT/9/-4.0000/55.9000/>.
- 5 For more studies on the use of non-formal music education to engage hard-to-reach groups, and which stress the horizontal relationship between project leaders and participants see Hargreaves *et al.* (2003), Folkestad (2006), and Saunders and Welch (2012).
- 6 Film footage can be viewed on Heavy Sound’s website: <http://www.heavysoundcic.co.uk>
- 7 Only one student opted out of the project on the grounds that he found the participant-led nature of COOL Music too stressful.
- 8 Those young people in the secure unit were referred there by the children’s hearing system because they were an immediate risk to themselves or others around them, for example, because of a chaotic family life, people around them involved in crime or they are putting themselves at risk by being involved in crime or by doing things they should not be doing at their age.
- 9 It should be noted that such an approach did not work for everyone. One participant, who was diagnosed with Asperger’s, required a more fixed, top-down approach and the project’s participant-led approach made him anxious to the extent that he removed himself from the programme.

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